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## MARILYN MANSON

interview by cyril helnwein  
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THE FRENCH SAY, "CONDEMNANT IL FAIT Q'UOD": "WE CONDEMN WHAT WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND." BUT THAT STOPS RIGHT HERE. LAY YOUR OPINIONS OF THE MAN TO REST UNTIL AFTER YOU'VE READ THE ENTIRE CONVERSATION BETWEEN **CYRIL HELNWEIN** AND **MARILYN MANSON**.

Cyril: Thank you for your time; it's an honor and a pleasure to interview you.

**Marilyn: Thank you. Of course, for everybody who reads this-- they won't know that our meeting has been very important to my career, because you introduced me to your father (Gottfried Helnwein) and we will go on to do lots of great stuff together. So, that's the behind-the-scenes story for everybody who's going to read this.**

C: I'm very excited about that because you are probably my most favorite artist.

**M: Thank you. I owe you because you hooked me up.**

C: You're quite welcome. Okay, so my first question: if it were the last day on earth, what would you be doing right now?

**M: Not an interview, that's for sure. I suppose I'd prefer to be performing. I've always said that would be the way I'd like to end things; with my death as a performance in itself. But, it's hard because you're torn-- you get attached to things, like your loved ones and your pets, so it would be a tough call. I suppose part of me would want to go on a killing spree and take out everyone who's fucked me over in life, and a part of me would probably just want to sit quietly with my cat and my girl. But it depends on what day you ask me; it's always different. But today is a good day, so I'd probably just want to sit with my cat.**

C: Being not only a musician, but also a performance artist, writer, producer, actor, director, and, recently, successful painter, where do you find all your inspiration? What drives you to create?

**M: I've always dreaded being called a "musician", because I always wanted to write and paint; I used to do art as a kid. I tried my hand at writing, and I enjoy being able to express**

myself in that way, but I didn't enjoy writing about other people. So, with journalism, there wasn't anything there. I do like watching other people and reporting on it, so I guess you end up doing the same thing when you're a painter or a singer. It all ends up being the same job. But journalism is, in a sense, the root of all evil and the root of all art, because it's really just about observing and reporting it to others. But I'm not ashamed to just merely be considered an entertainer, because art is entertaining; sometimes my stuff is funny, some of it has pain in it, some of it has confusion, some of it has anger, sex. I have a real hard time drawing the lines between any of them. The only thing that freed me up, and is an art form in itself, is acting. You're releasing yourself to the director, and you are sort of a tool of another artist. I've enjoyed the release because I'm so much in control of every detail of what I do, that it was interesting to have somebody else put me somewhere and do something and not play myself. You have to be another character, and it gets confusing, because I play so many different roles in my own life, just for my own amusement. People always ask me, "Are you the same on stage and off?" Sometimes I'm much more out of control off stage than on. People sometimes don't know if I'm nice or if I'm mean. I'm both. I reflect what you give to me. When I first began forming the idea of Marilyn Manson, it was a time when talk shows had really become a staple in American entertainment. Every channel had interviews with serial killers. And then there were stories about dead celebrities, and the two became intertwined. It started to bring to mind stories like The Black Dahlia, about the girl who came to Hollywood to become famous, but only became famous when she died. Or, more recently, Columbine. These kids wanted to be famous because they were considered nobodies. And they got what they wanted, and the news media gave it to them. That's when I first started seeing things about Marilyn Monroe that really interested me, because there was so much tragedy behind the beauty. I think so many people had overlooked that, because they dehumanized her later as just a product; a t-shirt sold on Hollywood Boulevard. And then at the same time I was seeing Charles Manson in interviews saying all these things; it made sense in '69, it made sense in '96, and it makes sense today. He was saying a lot of things that I've gone on to say, and I think he expresses the same idea that he is a reflection of culture. How can America hate something that it created? It's like being mad at your own shit. You should have eaten something different. All of that somehow started brewing up in my brain, and you have to decide what you're going to be when you grow up. I found out that I don't want to grow up, I want to be Peter Pan. So I decided to create a world where I didn't have to play by anybody's rules, and Marilyn Monroe and Charles Manson were the two things that spelled that world out. Phonetically, it's like "Abracadabra"; you know Manson by his last name, you know Marilyn by her first name, and it just goes together like "Mickey Mouse". It says everything; you say "Marilyn Manson" and it needs no explanation. It conjures up such images, no matter what country you're from. It's very American, but at the same time I think like a European, and my reason for choosing the name is both a celebration and a harsh criticism of America. And that kind of creates the whole contradiction that I thrive on. Working with your father and people like Tim Skold, who's now a member of the band from Sweden, I think that European artists appreciate my understanding of American culture because I look

at it as an outsider. I was always treated as an outsider. It doesn't make me hate America. It doesn't make me love it. It just makes me see it for what it is. In some way, it's a part of the problem and a part of the solution; being all you can be is entertaining in the midst of it because there is no final answer-- so just be part of the show. I don't want to be in the audience, I want to be on the stage. And now with what I'm doing, I don't want to be on the stage, I want *everybody* to be part of the show.

C: One of the first stories you wrote as a journalist was as Brian Warner about Marilyn Manson.

M: Deep down in my heart, I knew that I would get here, to what I am now. But in the initial insecurity of "where do I go from here in my life", I thought I could lead a secret identity. I thought I could continue to be a journalist and get a great job at *Rolling Stone* or something silly like that. I also started this band, and all of a sudden I thought, "Well, nobody really knows who I am. I don't have any friends here, so why don't I write the article? Why don't I call up all these record companies and say 'Hey, I got this great band-- Marilyn Manson. Would you sign them?'" It worked for a period until I didn't want to be two people anymore; I just wanted to be one person.

C: Would you rather be eaten by sharks or be injected with lethal toxins if you had to make a choice between those two?

M: [laughs] I think I have already had enough lethal toxins on a daily basis as it is, between absinthe and everything else. I have a real great fear of the ocean and sharks. I lived in Florida and I rarely went near the ocean, because as a kid the film *Jaws* really scared me. Earlier you asked where my inspirations come from, and films are where everything comes from for me. It's my inspiration for everything. And that's why, I think, I find myself able to direct something with the freedom of not creating something for public consumption; not working within the demands of the consumer-- creating it for artistic purposes. That's where I'm going to be happy. That's what I like about painting. Because when I did these paintings I did not think, "I wonder if people are going to like this," or "I wonder if someone's going to buy this. Do you think I should paint more of this type because it'll be more popular?" I painted because it made me calm and entertained me. Some of the paintings were gifts to other people, and it made me feel nice to give a gift to somebody. That was a nice freedom as an artist. As a musician you create a family of your fans, and it's like being a mother. If you start feeding your kids a certain thing every Sunday, you have to keep feeding them that, or they're going to get mad or want to go out and eat at McDonald's. [laughs] So as a musician, in terms of music, I do have to consider the desires of my fans, but I do want them to grow with me; I want them to accept change, but I don't want to be self-indulgent and arrogant and forsake their loyalty at the same time. It's a tough, sometimes very depressing, line to walk. And for someone like me, who's always changing and a shape shifter, it's hard to keep things going, but also be developed into a fast-forward culture where things are forgotten, sometimes before they're even remembered. I'm proud to say that I've been able to exist in the music industry this long, because most people don't.

C: That kind of brings me to the next question-- every album you've produced has its own different style, attitude, and vibe, yet it's still easily recognizable as Marilyn Manson. Do you think you'll ever get bored of doing that specifically and do something completely different-- maybe start a boy band or something?

**M: Well, I do really like the scoring job. When I got to do *Resident Evil* we intentionally avoided it sounding like Marilyn Manson in a rock song sense. We did desire for the score to contain guitar elements, but we used them in a cold, mechanical, harsh way. My collaboration with Tim Skold was where that whole relationship began. I had a great time doing it because they had a hard time defining what I did, because of the different jobs different people do. There's the composer, who does the traditional string arranging. Then there's sometimes the person who supervises the music that they take from albums that already exist. And then there's the sound designer, who creates atmospheres and the alarming and emotion-invoking textures. I wanted to do all that. I didn't see any reason why there should be more than one person handling it, so they had a hard time. I guess I gave them more than they were expecting, and they were happy with it. But the other person who was hired for the job, Marco Beltrami, is very talented in a classical sense. He even writes out things on a piece of paper. Our music was 80% of what was on the film, but because he was the established composer we kind of took second billing for that. But I think we've kind of proven that we can do that sort of thing. We've gotten a lot of offers. I've just agreed to score the new interpretation of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which I myself thought could be very hokey. The first *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is the template for all horror movies-- it's the first and best, I would say, scary film; psychologically terrifying, not just a slasher movie. And the sounds in the score of that are all music-less; scraping and plucking string sounds and things like that. I've even sampled things from *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, [laughs] but I've mutated them enough so they shouldn't sue me. So I want to try and treat it in the same way. I had a meeting with the director and he said, "What do you think the music should be? Should we put a Marilyn Manson song in the end credits?" I thought that would ruin the film, because they're trying to create this interpretation of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as the real story. The movie we saw in the '70s was based on a real story, and now *this* is the true story. That's what gives it a real interesting twist. I read the script and I feel like, if the director does everything right, I can, with the music, make it a very scary movie. And they asked, "What are you going to do with the music?" I said, "People are really going to be paying me to create silence, because I think the absence of music is what is often most effective." Some of the best movies have no music in them.**

C: If you could wish one person gone from this earth-- never even to have existed, past or present, who would it be?

**M: That's hard. Everybody does have their own purpose. Every person that's caused harm to me-- that wound that they made has been bandaged with some song or something. So I wouldn't thank them for it, but I don't know if I'd be the same person. But maybe if I stepped outside my own personal existence,..**

**somebody who's ruined somehow that things work,.. hmmm,... That's tough, tough, tough. I suppose Adam; then none of us would be here. [laughs]**

C: If censorship weren't as strong in America, compared to Europe for example, would you have done more provocative and extravagant things, and where do you draw your own line?

**M: There is a different kind of censorship in Europe than there is in America. America has a lot of hang-ups on sex, but they sell and exploit it endlessly. They're ashamed of it, so that's where the censorship comes in. America's really ashamed of itself, whereas Europe is not. And that sexual shame is the source-- any Freudian, Jungian, psychiatrist, psychologist, will tell you that's what it all comes from-- American Christianity and the shame that it creates. But there's a lot of political censorship in Europe; your father's work finds itself in a lot of trouble as does mine. In Japan the cover of the *Mechanical Animals* album was censored-- but not because I was nude. Because I had six fingers. They are real sensitive about physical deformities. I said, "What about the rest of the--" [gestures towards his body] and so there are just odd things like that. I wasn't allowed any religious clothing or to have any references to religion when we played in Warsaw. Rather than canceling the show and disappointing the fans or changing the show, we played different songs. On the DVD that's coming out, there are some bits and pieces from that concert where we did a few things there that we only played once. In America, people want to arrest me for showing my ass or whatever, but yet they're selling *Girls Gone Wild* videotapes. That's the world we live in. There needs to be censorship because there need to be boundaries in order to cross the boundaries.**

C: True. Is there a point where you have your own personal boundary with things?

**M: Absolutely. Everything I have done is within my boundaries, and my boundaries are often more related to doing things for the wrong reasons. The thing that I hate most-- more than censorship, more than what the government or MTV or record companies tell you you can't do-- is when bands, musicians, artists, whatever they want to call themselves, censor themselves in order to succeed.**

C: Make compromises?

**M: Well, not make compromises after the fact. I think everybody has to do that to find the bigger picture. You have to find the compromise you can live with as an artist. For example, my new record has a lot of songs that they would consider to be singles to be played on the radio, and I might have to censor profanity for the single to be played on the radio. But if I would have, while writing the song, said, "This is really catchy. Maybe I shouldn't put this word in here," that's the wrong kind of thing. That's when you sell yourself out; when you censor your creation in anticipation for success or monetary gain. Everybody's going to have to make their work fit into the world around it after it's created. That's still part of the creation. I don't think that's necessarily censorship-- that's kind of putting things within the boundaries. It's part of being an artist and wanting to succeed. For me it isn't about money, as much as it is about wanting to**

**have as many people hear and see what I do. And you can easily defeat yourself by not making compromises that are for the better good.**

C: Right. When was the last time you watched a TV soap opera and what was it?

**M: I think the soap operas of today are these reality TV shows. I think part of it is the laziness of not wanting to hire actors, and part of it's the voyeurism-- which the Internet is partly responsible for. There's a real dangerous element of culture that is developing that needs to be stamped out, and I will not be a part of, and that is the interactive element of things like *TRL*, or when you're watching something on MTV that's like "Britney Spears is trying to pick what she's going to wear. Write in and help her decide." or "We're in the studio writing our song. Here's a piece of it. Tell us what you think." When the artist starts letting the audience help them create, then the art is destroyed. That's quite different from trying to please your audience, but it's developing a culture where eventually, because of video games and being able to make films with animation that look so real-- it eliminates the artist. It's not a fear, or my fear of being extinct; it's a fear of taking away the basic element, what it's all about. Sure, I use a computer to record music, but you have to be able to still have a set of crayons and paper to do something that's worthwhile. Eventually it will end up killing itself. Kids now have grown to be so demanding. It's the whole give-an-inch-take-a-mile thing. Once you start letting people make choices for you, eventually it'll make people not want to be creative. It's going to encourage a lack of creativity. On the Internet there's a lot of people that can just sit back anonymously and say, "That sucks. I can do that better." The challenge should be to do it better. That's why anybody that tries to criticize anybody's art, mine or someone else's, creates an environment that is truly a product of journalism. You can't define what something is. You can say you like it or you don't like it, but you can't take it apart.**

C: Everyone always has their own opinion of it.

**M: It all has its own meanings. That's just the basic idea of life being art, and just enjoying all of it at all times. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe someday I'll find out that I'm an actor playing somebody else. Like I had a great amnesia and no one told me.**

C: That would be quite a realization. You have often been unjustly accused of things by the finger-pointing media that you weren't responsible for. For example, the Columbine kids. Why do you think they especially like you as a scapegoat, and do you think that this is possibly a sign of your own originality and success as an artist?

**M: I think that I had as much to do with Columbine as everybody else does, as a part of American culture. But I think that's the reason why I chose "Crop Failure" as the title of a painting I did of Harris and Klebold. I think you have to blame the farmers when the flowers don't grow properly; you can't blame the landlord who owns the property. Or the girl that gets the bouquet. Or the guy who buys it for her. I think it's lazy journalism when people constantly refer to me as "shock rocker"-- it's a tiring term. Because I don't think that I'm shocking. I didn't try to be shocking. If I am shocking and I got**

your attention, that means that I'm good, because there's so much out there. If something gets your attention, it's good. I think that's the bottom line. And if it continues to get attention, for as long as I have, then that means that I'm really good and I should be proud of it. And I can say that without being arrogant. I think it's just a fact that we live in a world of really mediocre things, and I'm trying to raise the bar with everything I do. Trying to bring back a desire for a higher aesthetic and usher in this golden age of grotesque idea. That's obviously why I'm working with your father, and trying to collaborate with other people who are like-minded and want the world to be exciting like it was in Weimar-Berlin, or in the '70s in New York. Fashion, music, and art were rather decadent, and it was bursting at the seams; and then just watch everyone run in fear to try and stop it all. It's always fun instigating new things. I build something up, and someone else tries to break it down.

C: Tell us your best party joke, or some joke or prank you played on somebody else.

**M: I think one of my favorites was very mean-spirited. There was a girl in a hotel bar, while we were on tour, that came up to me while I was just trying to relax with my friends. She was quite obnoxious; asked me who I was, but it was quite clear she *knew* who I was. I told her, and then she said she wasn't a fan. I said, "Okay. That's fine." Then she sat down and kept bothering me, telling me how much she really didn't care who I was. So I said, "Go away then." Later, I went back to my room, and somehow she had found out what room I was in and knocked on my door. I had been at a spy store recently where they sold spy apparatuses and also prank items, and I bought this liquid container called "The Evacuator". You put several drops in someone's drink and they will immediately shit themselves. It said to not put in too much because it could result in hospitalization. Well, I poured the entire bottle into a glass and said, "I'm so glad to see you back. Why don't you come in and have a drink." Then I gave her the shot. She went back to her room, and her friend came knocking on my door waking me up. She asked, "Have you seen my friend?" I said, "She's not with me." She said, "Oh. Well I can't get in my room because the door's locked." So we broke in the door. We found her lying naked on the bed, covered in shit. She had gotten drunk, passed out, and shit all over herself.**

C: Oh no!

**M: I found that to be quite amusing. [laughs]**

C: She got what she deserved, I guess.

**M: Yeah.**

C: You've often and openly admitted to illegal drug use. Was this more to experiment artistically and help creatively, or rather for your personal pleasure?

**M: I think drugs are best when they are used to have fun, to loosen up. The worst use of drugs is when you're not able to deal with the depression or whatever it might be, or for self-destruction. I've gone through periods of extreme highs and lows and, particularly last week, I felt quite depressed. It wasn't really**

drugs or anything, but there was a little bit of apprehension about people seeing my paintings. And not that it matters much, but of course everybody-- especially me-- has feelings. I mean, what people underestimate about me is how sensitive I am. Because I'm so sensitive, that's why it's best being dramatic and why I have to build up such a show. But I found myself this week being rather positive. I have crossed the bridge onto the next level of where I need to go, and I'm quite confident that this is going to be the best era-- this golden age-- that's coming for me. This next album, I think, will show people exactly what I'm capable of. Anyone who underestimated me before will know differently now. So, I think, any drugs now are to be part of decadence and letting loose. I think absinthe is probably my worst vice, if I had to pick one, because I just like it. It tastes good and it makes me create a lot of, well I wouldn't say *makes* me, but it has inspired a lot of my best work-- a lot of my paintings, a lot of my writing. It does tap in, poke holes in the temple or lobe, and let out some demons that were hiding in there. So it's enjoyable, not a depressing thing. I used to be a miserable drinking person back in the early days of self-destruction, but now I'm a much happier person with a different approach.

C: Two paintings of yours, which are probably my favorite ones, look very absinthe-inspired. One is of William Burroughs, I believe; how you would like to look as an old man. The other is "The Enabler".

M: That's my friend Jonathan. Yeah, I suppose I really like the color green, too, so maybe I'm partly drawn to that. The "When I Get Old" painting-- it actually has some absinthe used in there. In a couple of them, as I was painting, I had my drink sitting right by my paint bowl, and I'd dip into the wrong one, so it mixed in the drink. I just painted with it because it makes a nice green.

C: Is there any one thing that gives you particular feelings of hate, fear, or disgust?

M: Well, there's more than one thing. While it's okay to lounge around and take days off, I suppose laziness or a lack of desire to accomplish anything disgusts me most. It might be because I have such an extreme work ethic, or rather, creative impulse-- because I don't really like to consider what I do "work". I have to be doing something constantly. It was hard for me not to want to sit down and paint today, because I was so happy with the show. I wanted to paint a new picture of my cat. I wanted to paint so many things, but I convinced myself to relax and meet with you and do this interview, and to go out; actually leave the house and have dinner, which is a rare thing for me. But I find it hard, and this is the reason why it's very difficult for me to find people to collaborate with, and to keep certain friends or band members in my life. Because while it is my vision, I think that I'm quite willing to share that with whoever has the same ambition and drive as I do. I find it particularly with Tim, who has helped me produce this record, and has encouraged me to do things that I had forgotten I like to do. Anyone who doesn't want to create, or who's satisfied with mediocrity, or anyone who just takes for granted their talent and lets it go to waste, whatever that might be. Even if it's mowing lawns, painting walls, whatever. I think that's the thing that disgusts me the most. I'm not an unkind



**person by any means. People that I love, I do anything for. I support my parents. They're both retired and have no retirement income. I support them completely. I take care of everybody that I care about. But you won't see me giving a dime to a beggar on the street. But I think that's actually part of a metaphor of the story your father and I are creating, and the idea of how liberal idealism is often the downfall of America; when you let people think it's okay to hold their hands out and expect other people, who work hard to get where they are, to give something to you.**

C: That also breeds further criminality.

**M: Yeah. A lot of people think that's all evil American capitalists, but it's easy to bitch about that if you're poor, and it's easy to hate it if you're rich. I don't consider myself extremely rich, but I think I worked hard for every dime I've earned. I cherish everything I own, and I don't spend my money foolishly.**

C: Is there one thing that gives you joy?

**M: Several things. My cat and I have a very nice relationship. She calms me down. Painting makes me very happy. Finishing a record and creating the record makes me very happy. Anal sex, good movies, being with the woman I love-- that goes back to the anal sex part-- I don't want you to think that was a homosexual reference. And I guess kind of getting to relax on a day like today; after the stress of having an art show and people honestly saying, "Hey, I liked what you did," and not just kissing my ass or trying to tell me what I want to hear. I feel like I accomplished something. I am a humble person. I'm very confident, and I think I do the best I can do. Now, people can debate whether I'm the best that there is. I know that I'm the best that I can be, and that's the best that anyone can be.**

C: Great, that wraps it up. Thank you very much again for your time. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

**M: I think people should just expect everything they've seen and heard from me to seem tame in comparison to what is to come.**

C: I look forward to it.

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